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NLRB WEB SITE AUTOMATES
ANSWERS TO ONLINE QUESTIONS

The latest innovation to the National Labor Relations Board's Web site is a self-service, automated system that provides users with immediate, relevant answers to many questions.

At the core of the new system is an intelligent "knowledge base" built on user interactions that allow users to ask questions while visiting the site. The system will serve as an adjunct to the Agency's Information Officers in 32 Regional Offices who answer phone inquiries during normal business hours. The purpose of the online knowledge base is to make it easy and convenient for the public to get on a 24/7 basis quick answers to frequently asked questions that do not require human interaction.

On the site's home page is a main navigation bar with a "Questions?" link, which takes a user to an easy-to-use interface. The user can type in a question about the NLRB in a search box or browse to see a "tree structure" of all the questions and answers in a category. The new application interprets the user's question and provides potential answers for the user to review. If the system cannot answer a question, it will notify the NLRB system administrator, and an answer will be provided by NLRB subject experts in the Division of Operations-Management, Office of the General Counsel. The system then learns by incorporating the new question and answer into its knowledge base, thereby improving its ability to answer questions in the future.

Since the Web site was launched in 1997, it steadily has attracted more traffic as we have posted a growing number of documents and improved its functionality. Average hits per month from public users now have reached roughly 2 million, twice the volume of just two years ago. In 2003, the NLRB began a major initiative to improve the site. Hosting the site at a state-of-the-art commercial facility, the Agency improved the site's design, navigational structure and search functionality – making it far easier for users to find information. It also added a huge number of additional documents (the site now contains 59,000 files totaling 5.5 gigabytes of documents), and began making the site interactive so users can transact business online with the NLRB, such as filing documents. The NLRB is continuing to expand the types and quantity of documents and other information available to the public online, subject to budgetary considerations.

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